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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a process to help state and local teacher associations and their partners: create a vision for teachers' professional development; identify partners; develop a plan for creating the professional development center; work effectively in partnership for extended periods of time; reach all teachers; and get results. After describing existing teaching center models, the paper explains that the models benefit from: stability deriving from legislation, inclusion in district or state budgets, and continuity of leadership in local teacher associations; direction by teachers and teacher-majority governing bodies that include other major stakeholders and partners; equal status and contributions from teachers and university faculty; emphasis on subject matter; and sufficient resources and equipment. The paper describes professional development centers of the new millennium, highlighting necessary characteristics (e.g., involving all teachers in the area, helping negotiate shifts in mandates, emphasizing standards for student learning, and being teacher-led). After describing organizational, political, and educational partners (unions, higher education, and business), the paper discusses professional development center governance and structure and offers suggestions for long-range funding strategies (e.g., lobby for legislative support, get a line item in the state budget, and get politicians to visit the program). (SM)

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ED 455 228

# CREATING TEACHER-LED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION

SUMMER 2000

**No. 2**

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THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT of EDUCATION

Establishing High-Quality Professional Development

# Creating Teacher-Led Professional Development Centers

## Centering the Teaching Profession

Teachers are eager to learn, and teachers' associations are increasingly using traditional union skills and activities to build the infrastructure for greater teacher professionalism and success in the classroom. Professional development centers can help to focus these activities and provide opportunities to set long-range goals and visions for the profession.

Teacher-led professional development centers can provide the long-term stability needed to allow the profession to flourish. The establishment of these important resources is not for just a few teachers or a few schools. It is work that must extend to all — to the three million currently teaching and to their successors.

The professional development center can be the organizing principle around which seemingly diverse pieces of work to transform teaching are carried out. Today, some of these pieces include (but are not limited to):

- Support for new teachers to ensure success during the first few years in the profession
- Opportunities to discuss standards and assessments for student learning
- Development of innovations in practice
- Adoption of innovations in practice
- Curriculum development
- Leadership development
- Peer assistance
- Deepening and renewing subject-specific knowledge
- Assistance with pursuing certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
- Teacher research

These are imperative for teachers' professional development and are the responsibility of the profession itself. In order to realize a new vision of teaching, the profession must convene the partners and resource providers necessary to provide such development.

*continued on page 2*

## About NFIE

THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT of EDUCATION

NFIE empowers public education employees to innovate, take risks, and become agents for change to improve teaching and learning in our society. As the foundation of the National Education Association, NFIE believes that all students can learn and that quality education begins with teachers.

NFIE's work is rooted in the belief that teachers' professional development is a cornerstone of reforms that heighten student achievement. The foundation helps teachers to take responsibility for the quality of the profession, play a leadership role in the development of research and policy affecting public education, and acquire skills, knowledge, and experience in ways that contribute to student success.

This paper outlines issues and questions that teacher associations, school districts, state policymakers, higher education institutions, and education agencies and organizations should consider in designing or enhancing teacher-led professional development centers. These questions and issues reflect the experiences and observations of teachers, professors, school and state education administrators, and union leaders who possess first-hand knowledge of what to seek and what to avoid when creating a professional development center. The paper is based on the proceedings of a symposium held in Portland, Oregon, in August 1999, co-sponsored by NFIE and the division of Affiliate Capacity Building of the National Education Association. One of a series, the symposium is a part of *A Change of Course*, NFIE's program to improve the quality and availability of professional development for public school teachers nationwide.



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*continued from page 1*

This paper uses the term "center" broadly. It may refer to an actual place where people convene to study and collaborate. It may also have a virtual existence, both in terms of electronic delivery of learning opportunities and the facilitation, support, or brokering of services to enable all teachers to participate. While a virtual component will enhance the professional development center's value and reach, research shows that the existence of a bricks and mortar home where teachers can convene for learning is greatly desired by almost all teachers (*Member Professional Development Survey*, National Education Association, 1999).

The pages that follow outline a process that state and local teacher associations and their partners can undertake to:

- Create a vision for teachers' professional development
- Identify the partners who will help to realize the vision
- Develop a plan to make the professional development center a reality
- Work effectively in partnership for an extended period of time
- Reach all teachers
- Get results

The greatest challenges to designing professional development centers for the new millennium are finding ways to reach every teacher and embedding the center's work in every school building. To accomplish these goals, new models for professional development centers will have to be established and significant resources dedicated to their design and sustained support.

## Learning from Existing Teacher Center Models

### *The National Education Association's Work in Professional Development*

In 1998, the National Education Association (NEA) created a new unit named "Teaching and Learning" in order to strengthen its capacity to meet the professional needs of NEA members. Teaching and Learning is currently developing a comprehensive professional plan that capitalizes on NEA's unique ability to disseminate information and to network members and affiliates. To accomplish this plan, Teaching and Learning is developing a number of national partnerships that are designed to provide information on and access to high-quality learning opportunities for all affiliates and members.

An emerging trend within many NEA state affiliates and large locals is an interest in establishing professional development centers to provide an array of direct services, information, and assistance to members for their advanced learning. Newly funded by the Oregon Education Association is the Oregon Center for Teaching and Learning. The center's mission is to support an effective public education system through building and promoting professional partnerships and practices. This is accomplished by creating coalitions, providing professional development activities, offering licensure assistance to members, providing information about grants, and offering links to research data bases.

The new professional development center sponsored by the Delaware State Education Association and funded through a grant from a major corporation has been set up as a separate nonprofit. A full-time director is in place and reports to a governing board that consists of the leadership of the teacher association. After two years of

operation, the governing board will expand to include representatives of higher education, business, the PTA, the legislature, and the governor's office, while maintaining a teacher majority. In its first full year of operation, the center is conducting a major needs assessment, both to help it build its program and to engage superintendents and the teachers. The center hopes to become a clearinghouse for good professional development rather than a direct deliverer of courses. It has also identified six schools across the state for intensive assistance with whole-school improvement and reform. This year the center hopes to get a line item in the state budget. The business community is strongly behind the center's belief that professional development is essential for education reform.

The new Helen Bernstein Center for Professional Development is housed in the headquarters of United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), and is currently governed by the union's executive board. The center will have a board with an equal number of members appointed by UTLA and by the district, with each also appointing external members to represent higher education, business, and other stakeholders. Two-thirds of the district and union board members will be classroom practitioners. The board will make decisions by consensus.

One major difference between professional development centers at the local level and the state level is that large locals often seek to provide direct services and programs for teachers, whereas state-level centers conceptualize their work as facilitating, brokering, building capacity, or serving as a clearinghouse for activities, with services provided primarily online rather than in person.

The Vermont Education Association is working closely with its state department of education to establish regional professional development centers, and a number of other NEA affiliates at both local and state levels are entering into new partnerships with higher education institutions to facilitate professional development for teachers. There are also district-supported professional development centers, such as the Teaching and Learning Academy in Memphis. The best enjoy strong support from both local union affiliates and principals. Many other NEA and AFT affiliates are engaged in activities to support professional development for their members with and without creating "centers."

### *North Carolina*

An established effort can be seen in North Carolina, where the North Carolina Teacher Academy has provided very effective professional development in technology, literacy, curriculum development, teacher mentoring, and other areas for a number of years. The academy has an autonomous board of trustees, much like a university board of trustees, appointed by the governor, speaker of the house, and president of the senate. The academy has the status of a university. Half of the board is composed of teachers; the other half includes representatives of groups with a direct role in professional development, as stipulated by statute. The academy is at the University of North Carolina, whose commitment to adult learning and systemic change is consistent with the academy's mission. Summer institutes are held at public and private universities in the state. The North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) serves as a lobbyist for the academy. Most of the academy's board members are members of NCAE. The director of the academy is a past NCAE president, and the chairman of the academy board has held NCAE leadership positions.

NCAE is justifiably proud of the academy and makes sure the members know that it is an NCAE initiative. The academy annually trains 3,000 teachers, who study in teams at week-long summer institutes. The summer work is followed up during the school year with whole faculties in the schools. NCAE lobbies for increased state support each year for the academy's $4.5 million budget. The academy's 20,000 participants to date are now

a formidable constituency throughout the state. They believe in the program and "won't allow the legislature to mess with it," says John Wilson, the executive director of NCAE. The association's leaders and staff are also behind the center. Several NCAE board members have been trainers at the academy, and many UniServ staff (who work on behalf of several locals) have encouraged schools in their areas to attend. This is how association leadership and leadership for quality professional development become one and the same.

Teachers attending the North Carolina Teacher Academy are compensated for their time and treated professionally. The academy's summer institutes are oversubscribed, with teachers from low-performing schools given priority to attend. The academy has a full-time evaluator, who tracks the progress of teachers who have attended its programs. Data from these studies help to make the case for increased funding.

Teachers who participate in the academy's programs receive credit toward the renewal of their licenses. The academy also includes principals in its training and requires them to join faculty teams who come to the program. The inclusion of principals is critical to their ability to lead instructional change in the school and to support the implementation of work that teachers will want to undertake as a result of the professional development they receive at the academy.

### *Miami-Dade County, Florida*

The Miami-Dade Monroe Teacher Education Center (TEC) in Florida is well into its third decade of serving the professional learning needs of teachers in Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. Its success derives from the following features:

- The teacher center is strongly supported by the United Teachers of Dade union and focuses on professionalism.
- County-wide teacher centers in Florida were founded by state legislation that mandated university involvement.
- Since the sunset of the law that created the centers, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools have continued their center's activities with a significant budget line.

The TEC is exemplary of the first generation of teacher centers. Although its work is not primarily oriented toward school-based change, its staff members are assigned to spend their time and efforts in schools in the various regions of this large and diverse system. Their presence there, their ability to tailor programs to needs that arise in the schools, and the high level of trust accorded them help to explain the center's enduring effectiveness.

In the TEC's heyday, it was able to command "university hours," which were part of the enabling legislation for the centers. University hours permitted the teacher-director of the center to call on faculty from nearby universities to spend part of their time collaboratively designing and offering professional development for teachers in the two counties served by the center. The TEC provides programs for both practicing classroom teachers and teacher interns; it also has a program for training substitute teachers.

The Miami-Dade Monroe TEC has credibility with both the teachers and the district administration. Through the support of the union and the district alike, the TEC has survived many changes of district administration. The center has been especially fortunate to enjoy stable union leadership and support over its entire lifetime.

Perhaps the most valuable feature of the TEC, according to its director, is its bricks and mortar existence — a place where teachers can convene or consult the reference library, and where their professionalism is acknowledged and celebrated with the kinds of amenities that people in the business world take for granted. The professional development center of the Memphis City Schools and the Mayerson Academy in Cincinnati go even further: Both have rehabilitated old school buildings to look like corporate training centers, complete with the latest in technology tools and sleek furnishings.

### *California*

A different model for delivering professional development has been funded by the state of California for its subject-matter projects. Regionally organized and tied to the state curriculum frameworks, the subject-matter projects are university-based programs that have served thousands of teachers in mathematics, history, writing, and other subjects since 1989. Each project promotes collaborations among teachers and university faculty, respecting all as equally knowledgeable and able to contribute to the design and conduct of learning. The regional centers' aim is to "become self-sustaining, intellectually vibrant communities and professional homes for the state's teachers" ("Essential and Sustaining Features of K–12/University Collaboration," Robert Polkinghorn, 1999). The California projects have addressed their programs to state academic content standards, to student results, and to low-performing schools. In the current climate of accountability, this shift in goals and activities was necessary to the survival of the work, but the focus by teachers and professors on subject matter and appropriate teaching and assessment in the subjects remains the most important feature of this state-wide system.

### *Lessons from Existing Teacher Centers*

All of these models have benefited from one or more of the following characteristics:

- Stability deriving from legislation, inclusion as line items in the district or state budget, and continuity of leadership in the local teacher association
- Direction by teachers and a teacher-majority governing body that is also inclusive of other major stakeholders and partners
- Equal status and contributions from teachers and university faculty
- A focus on subject matter
- An attractive place where teachers can conduct their work with good resources and equipment

## The Professional Development Center for the New Millennium

New teacher-led professional development centers must draw on these characteristics of successful centers and push ahead in new areas. The professional development centers of the future need to be more inclusive than exclusive, and serve principals and paraprofessionals as well as teachers. If the center is sponsored primarily by a union that represents other school employees, education support personnel should be included as well as teachers. The centers of the future might be coordinated from a place external to the schools, but serve to embed professional development within the day-to-day work of schools. The center, therefore, should organize a wide variety of activities carried out by a partnership whose goal is the continuous improvement of instruction leading to gains in student achievement. The professional development center of the future should:

- Serve as a safe haven for individual and collective risk-taking
- Involve all of the teachers in the area served by the center
- Make use of the leadership skills that teachers acquire at various stages in their career
- Build bridges between what is mandated, what teachers and administrators say they need, and what is best practice
- Help negotiate shifts in mandates
- Generate work that leads to better policies and help legislatures to frame productive, research-based mandates
- Link the learning in one school to another
- Bring resources from the local area and from outside it
- Serve as a clearinghouse for high-quality professional development
- Be the broker or matchmaker between needs and resources, and be responsive to schools and the decisions they make about how to improve
- Focus on standards for student learning
- Provide a long-term focus on changes in knowledge and practice, with follow-up in school sites
- Ensure the presence of qualified building-based teacher mentors/coaches with few or no other duties; set criteria for these positions; train the incumbents
- Build effective school teams, inclusive of the principal
- Transform the principal into the chief instructional leader
- Connect to the school improvement plan and school improvement process/management process
- Be established external to the district or existing state education bureaucracy
- Be teacher-led
- Rise above politics but be able to use the union's power to achieve professional goals

Unless the professional development center has the appropriate structure, partners, and governance system, it will become yet another addition to the bureaucracy. This means that the professional development centers of the future need to be carefully structured and accountable to both teachers and the public. In order to do this, public engagement in the importance of the work and documentation of the results of the work should be considered in planning and designing the professional development center. The center must also help teachers address their practice to results and help define responsibility for results.

Deep backing and support from the teachers' union will be critical to the success of these new professional development centers. The union must not marginalize this work: It should be "an integral part of union activity, just like our efforts around hours, wages, and working conditions," in the words of John Perez, vice president of United Teachers Los Angeles. In a 1999 nationwide poll conducted by the National Education Association, 86 percent of classroom teachers (all ages, all areas of the country, all teaching assignments) wanted their local unions to bargain for more resources for professional development, and 87 percent wanted their locals to secure more teacher input into the design of professional development (*Member Professional Development Survey*, National Education Association, 1999).

Another caution is not to allow the professional development center to become merely a place for remediation. There are immediate and crisis needs for professional development, especially in states where large numbers of unlicensed and unprepared people are being thrust into the classroom on an emergency basis. But a professional development center that becomes overwhelmed by responding to such needs will lose its identity as a safe place for risk-taking and innovative practice by all teachers.

The professional development center should be a source of R&D for the profession. Along the route to this goal, however, it is possible that professional development centers will be designed to operate not as the provider of training, but as the advocate and facilitator of training — the place where the vision is formulated and the enabling policies are addressed. The center could also be an important source for documenting the link between high-quality professional development and student results, gathering data to disseminate to school boards, legislators, and schools.

Professional development centers themselves should be sources of new ideas — places that help to set the policy agenda based on research and best practice rather than vassals of state or district mandates. To achieve this, professional development centers should be "free from the short-term funding box," in the words of Dennis Krueger, training specialist for the Iowa State Education Association.

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## Organizational, Political, and Educational Partners

Essential partners in creating and sustaining a professional development center begin with the teachers' association at the state or local level, and include the state department of education, the district or districts in the area to be served, public and private higher education institutions (in toto, not just the schools of education), and many others, such as business, parents, existing professional development providers, and community organizations.

### *Unions*

Unions have a major role to play in launching and sustaining teacher-led professional development centers. They convene the coalitions and partners, devise the political strategy for long-term funding, ensure a defining role for teachers in the governance and work of the centers, and assist higher education with needed change for effective partnership in the center. As in the North Carolina example, the union itself may need to change its priorities to ensure that professional development becomes the work of its leadership and staff. Professional development should take a place at the heart of collective bargaining and advocacy. Dedicated union staff have a unique perspective on serving the needs of members, helping them to be successful, and drawing on public and private support. For example, teachers should carry out the curriculum development, assessment, improvement of practice, research, induction of new colleagues, and mentoring that make up the prerequisites of professional practice. But they must also have the time in which to do it. The professional development center, which should advocate and support all of these activities, needs the union and district partners to agree to restructure time in the teachers' day, week, and year. Bargaining, lobbying, and collaborating among unions, teachers, and state departments of education are essential. It means learning how to "advocate for quality instead of quantity," in John Wilson's words.

A teacher-led professional development center can help to "raise the union's consciousness," says Colleen Bielecki, director of professional issues for the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals. In the North Carolina Association of Educators, "everyone — the leaders, the lobbyists, the UniServ directors — works on professional development. That's how we change the culture," says John Wilson. The professional development center "should be what the union does in its general course of business," he adds. In general, the teacher association can play a critical role in gaining the confidence and trust of the teachers and in lobbying for legislation to establish and fund the center and its partnership relations.

### *Higher Education*

Higher education has uniquely valuable resources to offer, not only in the form of traditional courses and degrees, but especially in collaboratively designed work with practicing teachers. The Bay Area Writing Project is the model for such work. It was founded in 1974 by teachers and professors who recognized that they had a shared problem: the inability of students to write well. When they sat down to look at the problem in a spirit of equal and true collaboration, they created an entirely new discipline and a movement that has grown and spread throughout the country.

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Universities and colleges are essential to helping teachers succeed with student learning standards. Bringing teachers and their higher education colleagues together to consider what should be taught, how it should be taught, and how it should be assessed, should be the major work of professional development centers.

The work should not be created at the university and then offered to teachers to receive on a voluntary basis. Schools need ways of calling on dedicated professorial time to help them to address new academic content standards. This is not about teachers needing to learn new content from professors, but about joint discussions with professors concerning what it looks like at different developmental stages when students are demonstrating their command of science or history or mathematics.

The professional development centers of the new millennium need to secure institutional commitments from higher education like Florida's legislated "university hours," which mandated and dedicated university faculty time for working with teachers. Other models also exist. In Franklin County, Ohio, the public school districts and the teachers' unions have entered into an "exchange of services agreement" with The Ohio State University. Under this arrangement, teachers have access to "college scrip" (essentially tuition credit) in return for services and opportunities that the public schools provide to the university, such as placing interns in the schools and conducting research in classrooms. In Oklahoma, education faculty in both public and private universities are required to dedicate ten hours per annum in schools each year. In addition, Oklahoma State University has a "master teacher in residence," who coordinates interaction between K–12 teachers and the university's faculty.

Adapted from a list of "Questions, Lessons, Tensions, and Opportunities" prepared by Robert Polkinghorn of the University of California, here is a summary of the issues to be addressed. In engaging higher education partners in the creation of teacher professional development centers, unions should:

- Identify and understand the university's institutional interests, concerns, priorities, and problems and find a way to match them to the mission of the professional development center
- Stay focused on professional development in the subject matter
- Create space and time for joint study, opportunities to critique each other's teaching, and opportunities to share each other's specialized knowledge and wisdom
- Create opportunities for each to experience the world of the other first-hand; activities should be both in schools and on campuses
- Create opportunities for both teachers and professors to engage in each other's typical modes of professional behavior; both should experience summer institutes, classroom-based coaching, mentoring, professional writing, resource development, action research, policy development, analysis, advocacy, book retreats, and seminars
- Avoid the "faculty know content, teachers know pedagogy" trap; the professional development center creates opportunities for a new kind of knowledge and skill that partakes of both
- Move beyond the individual volunteer professor offering an institute to individual, volunteering teachers

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*Other Partners*

The business community, state legislature or other political entities, parent groups, education associations representing administrators and support staff, school boards, students, and many others could be viable partners for the organizational, political, or educational needs of the professional development center. It may be important to require that each full partner put financial as well as in-kind resources on the table right from the start. Other education partners might include existing partnerships as well as additional nonprofit providers of resources to teachers and schools. State councils on the arts and humanities, regional educational laboratories, local education funds, arts agencies, and other cultural and scientific organizations in the city or state where centers operate abound. There may not even be a need to create a center, but rather to bring the teachers and their association more fully and powerfully into collaboration with an existing center and expand its mission.

- In forming educational partnerships, begin by assessing what is already available in the region to be served.
- Invite or join with individuals/groups who address the goals of the professional development center; say no to everyone else.
- Include potential blockers, political partners who can make or break the center. Help them make the center their agenda.
- Be research- and results-driven.
- Look at the potential for different kinds of partners: those who are necessary to get the center started, and those who will help with the ongoing work.

## Governance and Structure of Professional Development Centers

While professional development centers vary greatly depending on local and regional differences, the kinds of partners at the table, and the kinds of programs already in place, a few guiding ideas for governance and structure can be suggested to support the long-term sustainability of the centers.

Centers can be supported at the statewide level, the regional level, or in large districts or counties with sufficient resources and numbers of teachers to be served. With large and complex partnerships, governance is difficult if everyone needs a seat at the table. Keeping the governing board small, especially initially, is important.

Several statewide and large local professional development centers in the formative stages have become stuck on the governance question. A true partnership gives voice to all of the key stakeholders, even if teachers comprise the majority on the founding board. The professional development board should include teachers who have demonstrated leadership in their own professional development and that of their colleagues.

## Some Suggestions for Long-Range Funding Strategies

- Lobby for support from the legislature; build the constituency for the program with teachers themselves and energize their support for the legislation.
- Shift the location of funding for professional development from investment in central office or intermediate unit staff to investment in school-based mentors.
- Bargain half-time or full-time mentor positions for every fifteen to thirty teachers in every school.
- Advocate for two weeks or more per annum for teachers' professional development.
- Get a line item in the state budget for a defined center.
- Establish a nonprofit entity to receive direct funds from legislatures.
- Require local districts and associations to provide financial support to maintain their place on the governing board and/or receive services.
- Collect and provide hard data showing the effectiveness of the program. Make an annual case statement (some suggest hiring a lawyer to muster the evidence and make the case).
- Use state funds to raise other funds on a dollar-for-dollar match (including grant funds and pro bono services).
- Get politicians and their staff to visit the program and spend time with the teachers.
- Dedicate a percentage of UniServ time to getting funding for instructional issues.
- Identify ineffective uses of state funds and seek to have them redirected to the professional development center. Most states fund regional or county-level service centers that consume large amounts of professional development funding, leaving little to invest directly in school buildings and faculties. These funds need to be reallocated, but they have formidable political allies despite their ineffectiveness. Make comparisons with highly effective teacher-led professional development centers. In North Carolina, the State Department of Public Instruction is no longer in the business of delivering professional development. That work belongs in the schools and in the teacher-led professional development centers.
- Secure an agreement or legislation for a certain number of hours or days or credits from public and private universities that will be dedicated to collaborative work with teachers through the professional development center.

## Resources

Bay Area Writing Project:
www-gse.berkeley.edu/outreach/bawp/bawp.html

California Subject Matter Projects:
www.ucop.edu/csmp/

Dade–Monroe Teacher Education Center:
www.dade.k12.fl.us/pers/prodev/tec.htm

Dade Academy for the Teaching Arts:
www.dade.k12.fl.us/pers/prodev/data.htm.

Memphis City Schools Teaching and Learning Academy:
www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/admin/tlapages/academyhome.html

National Education Association:
www.nea.org

National Foundation for the Improvement of Education:
www.nfie.org

National Humanities Center Teacher Leadership for Professional Development Program:
www.nhc.rtp.nc.us:8080/tlpd

North Carolina Teacher Academy:
www.ga.unc.edu/NCTA

Oregon Education Association:
www.oregoned.org

*Teachers Take Charge of Their Learning: Transforming Professional Development for Student Success.* Judith Rényi. National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1996.
www.nfie.org/takechar.htm

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